

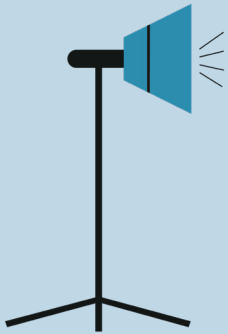
HIV COVID-19 Network Briefing Eight

A fortnightly update from the voluntary sector



28 July 2020

1. Spotlight: Resuming face to face services



As lockdown eases and greater social interaction is permissible, a number of HIV services have been grappling with if and how to safely resume face to face services. Services have been successfully operating remotely throughout lockdown and have been well received by clients, with some organisations even expanding provision through setting up remote testing services for example. As a sense of community is absolutely vital for support services however so there is a desire to return to in person activities if possible.

Key concerns exist around whether this can be replicated in a socially distanced manner; how personal relationships and trust may be impacted if people are wearing masks, or whether facilities are big enough to run groups where people can maintain a 2m distance from each other. While running smaller groups is a solution to this problem, it may not be viable in terms of staff resource which will increase if more groups are required to take place. LGBT Foundation faces the additional challenge of not having their own space at present to run services out of, ensuring borrowed or rented space is COVID secure and has the capacity to store clinical waste etc. in line with specific needs will be difficult.

Currently many service providers are in the process of resuming operations; conducting risk assessments and reopening offices for a limited amount of staff in the first instance. Brigstowe's offer has evolved in line with Government advice; when it was announced that people from different households can meet while maintaining social distancing, support staff and peer mentors were able to deliver face to face services outdoors once a risk assessment with the mentee/client was undertaken.

The balance of risk remains a constant concern with support services conflicted about whether encouraging in person interactions and travel puts clients, volunteers and staff at greater risk. Dr Michael Brady, Medical Director at THT, is producing regular risk assessment framework for resuming THT services that has proven helpful. Some organisations are now considering home visits. Alongside information-sharing among comparable support services some guidance from the government on resuming such services safely is much needed.

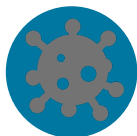


2. Clinical services

- People living with HIV are reporting that HIV clinics are increasingly advising them to visit their GP practice to have their regular blood tests taken during the pandemic. This is attributed to a number of reasons; clinics not having the capacity to do bloods yet, people being reluctant to visit hospital settings due to fear of COVID transmission, and GPs generally being closer to home and therefore considered a safer journey to make during the pandemic, especially for those who continue to shield. While this option may be convenient for some, for others having their status known at a GP practice is causing anxiety if they do not trust that information can remain confidential and may end up in the local community. This is especially the case for people living in smaller, rural areas.



Considering the power dynamics of the patient-doctor relationship many people living with HIV feel pressured to act on these suggestions. It is therefore important for clinics to be mindful of how they communicate this issue, making it clear that individuals can decide where and whether to have their bloods done according to their personal preference.



3. Resources

- The new HIV Treatment Bulletin has been published by i-base which provides a comprehensive overview of a number of presentations given at AIDS 2020 virtual conference on COVID-19. It also reports on studies and cases of HIV and COVID co-infection internationally and can be downloaded [here](#).
- Now that face coverings are mandatory in shops and other enclosed public spaces the government has provided a list of [exemptions](#) detailing people who are not required to wear them. This includes disabled people, those experiencing breathing difficulties, mental health conditions and distress. Optional [exemption cards](#) have also been produced for these groups should they wish to use this resource to communicate their situation.



GET INVOLVED

- » The HIV/COVID network is running a survey for voluntary sector organisations, community members and clinicians working in the HIV sector to shape its future work. Please complete the survey [here](#) by the end of Thursday 30 July.